

Preventing Alcohol-Related
Problems on Campus

Vandalism



The Higher Education Center
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Preventing Alcohol-Related Problems on Campus: Vandalism

by Joel Epstein and Peter Finn

Student vandalism is a complex problem with no easy single solution. Vandalism can take many forms, from trashing dormitories to stealing property to writing graffiti. Student vandalism may be associated with binge drinking, peer pressure, the need to obtain money to buy drugs, hostility toward the school, or a combination of these and other factors.

To address this difficult problem effectively, college administrators need to develop a comprehensive plan that includes multiple prevention approaches which address each facet of the problem. Rather than focusing exclusively on the symptoms of the problem, at least some of the approaches need to address the school's drinking environment and attitudes toward violence which may

underlie student vandalism, including campuswide norms and school policies that tolerate or even facilitate binge drinking.

This bulletin provides concrete suggestions for the components of a comprehensive approach to reducing student vandalism. While few hard data are available on the effectiveness of the approaches described in this report, colleges and universities report that these efforts are showing signs of success.

Drinking and Vandalism Go Hand-in-Hand

The relationship between drinking and violence among college and university

students is clear. A study of 12,651 college students conducted in 1991 by the Towson University Campus Violence Prevention Center found that more than six out of ten students who destroyed or damaged property on campuses reported they were drunk at the time.¹ A 1991 study of 4,845 students from 68 colleges and universities found that one in ten students had engaged in vandalism due to alcohol in the past year. Nearly one-quarter of heavy drinking students had engaged in vandalism.²

Schools Pay the Price

A major reason so many schools are faced with substantial vandalism is because so many students drink too much. According to Julie Anne Rodak, an attorney with the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) in Albany, many colleges and universities pay a huge economic and social price for alcohol-related vandalism.

Colleges and universities pay a high economic and social price for alcohol-related vandalism.

While few estimates of the actual cost of vandalism to schools are available, an

***Preventing Alcohol-Related Problems: Vandalism* is one of three related reports published by the Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Each publication suggests how colleges and universities can reduce a different type of violence that many students engage in largely as a result of excessive drinking or other drug use. This bulletin discusses steps schools are taking to prevent destruction of property by intoxicated students. *Preventing Alcohol-Related Problems: Acquaintance Rape*, a guide produced by the Center, addresses the problem of acquaintance rape. A second Center guide, *Preventing Alcohol-Related Problems: Impaired Driving*, focuses on how schools can prevent students from driving after drinking.**

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¹ Bausell, R.B.; Bausell, C.R.; and Siegel, D.G. The Links Among Alcohol, Drugs and Crime on American College Campuses: A National Followup Study. Unpublished report by the Towson State University Campus Violence Prevention Center, Towson, Maryland, 1994.

² Engs, R.C., and Hanson, D.J. Boozing and brawling on campus: A national study of violent problems associated with drinking over the past decade. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 1994, 22:171-189.

indication of the cost may be gained by speaking with the school's buildings and grounds or maintenance staff, and by looking at the school's annual report of criminal activity for property offenses. In 1993, for example, Towson State University recorded 130 reports of destruction of property and two incidents of malicious burning. Other areas that school officials may want to examine to estimate the magnitude of the problem include setting off false fire alarms, tampering with automobiles, telephones, and other equipment, and defacement of property (graffiti).

Dormitories and other campus buildings near bars or other places where alcohol is served may bear the brunt of vandalism associated with drinking. Several deans of students interviewed for this bulletin identified intoxicated students leaving sporting events and fraternity parties as the primary cause of campus vandalism. The Towson study found that vandalism was usually associated with some sort of partying and was likely to be committed within a dormitory or other group living arrangement.

A 1991 study found that vandalism tended to be more often associated with some sort of partying and was more likely to be committed within a dormitory or other group living arrangement.

Most colleges and universities view vandalism as part of a general problem with campus violence. However, a few schools have instituted strategies that are targeted specifically at preventing this particular alcohol-related crime. Some of these schools consider vandalism as an issue for campus police or the office of residence life to address. Other schools, because of the close link between drinking and vandalism, treat it as a health problem. Both perspectives have merit and, when

combined, may result in the most effective strategy for curtailing the problem.

Schools that have taken steps targeted explicitly at preventing vandalism report that their efforts have contributed to

- reducing the incidence of alcohol and other drug use among students;
- making the campus safer for students and staff;
- saving the school money;
- improving or preserving the physical appearance of campus buildings and grounds; and
- improving morale among students and staff.

A nationwide survey conducted by Towson State University showed that nearly half of students who committed crimes on campuses said that their crimes, including vandalism, were alcohol-related.

What Schools Are Doing To Combat the Problem

Cal Aggie Hosts

At the University of California, Davis, Sergeant Mike Adams of the police department reports that dormitories at his school are the most likely target of alcohol and other drug-related vandalism. During final exam week and, more generally, at the end of the academic year, student trashing of dormitories is common.

To combat the problem, the school hires students to patrol the dormitories from 11 p.m. to 3 a.m. The students, part of a program called *Cal Aggie Hosts*, confront loud noise and vandalism, and confiscate

Furniture Out the Window

School administrators should anticipate that intoxicated students may damage or destroy whatever they can get their hands on. Robin Wechsler of the Marin Institute in San Rafael, California, visited a number of schools as part of an informal study of alcohol and other drug use on college campuses. Concerning the enormity of the problem, Wechsler notes that in Plattsburgh, New York, students have invented a game—"furniture out of the window." According to Wechsler, "Students get drunk and compete by hoisting a couch or some other piece of furniture out of dorm windows." Graffiti, other physical damage to buildings, and the destruction of trees are also common results of excessive student drinking.

liquor and beer bottles from students. University police officers train the student *Hosts* in policies and procedures, and in conflict recognition and management. The police show the students training videotapes and give them a training manual describing their assignments.

In campus dormitories, *Hosts* patrol in pairs, serving as the eyes and ears for campus police. When they observe vandalism, they call university police to take appropriate action. *Hosts*, who are considered University of California police department employees, carry police radios and are dispatched through the police dispatcher.

While *Cal Aggie Hosts* is active in preventing vandalism in dormitories, the program was formed originally to prevent violence among concert-goers at campus events. Adams reports that at events at the school's 9,000-seat recreation facility the presence of *Hosts* has helped reduce the incidence of vandalism at vending machines and in bathrooms, where drunken students used to break bathroom

Another Benefit of Reducing Vandalism:

Improved School-Community Relations

Improved relations with the local community can also be an important benefit of targeting alcohol and other drug-related vandalism. In 1989, the townspeople of Eugene, Oregon reacted with rage to an incident involving the destruction of property during a disturbance by intoxicated students in a neighborhood near the University of Oregon. This incident underscored the school's need to address student drinking and to develop methods of preventing similar incidents in the future.

In an attempt to address the conditions that led to the vandalism, school officials set up a joint school-community task force that sponsored several nonalcoholic campuswide events. A team of students also began working with local police and party hosts to develop approaches to addressing excessive weekend partying before it became a problem. Some of the approaches that were put in place included improved security at campus events and expanded substance-free prevention programming.

Schools can help prevent the type of disturbance that occurred in Eugene by carefully reviewing their own alcohol and other drug policies, and by ensuring that these policies do not inadvertently encourage excessive drinking and drug use. School administration officials can also urge local bars to stop serving alcohol to underage drinkers and intoxicated legal drinkers. By preventing vandalism in these and other ways described in this bulletin, schools can help maintain or improve good relations with the surrounding community.

fixtures, write graffiti, plug up toilets, and scatter paper goods. According to Adams, *Cal Aggie Hosts* has also significantly reduced vandalism in a recently opened parking structure.

In recent years, according to Adams, "Football games here have become almost alcohol-free. Public drinking at games has dropped to almost zero. Where police used to confiscate hundreds of bottles during a game, now we are lucky if we find two to three bottles of beer at a game. And we're not witnessing much vandalism after games either."

The program has learned a great deal from other universities and from rock concert promotion companies about policing school events. These schools and concert promoters have shared their experiences with identifying potential problems before they erupt, exercising crowd control, and controlling traffic flow. They have taught the Davis campus police methods of monitoring concert-goers for bottles and for responding to violent behavior by intoxicated students.

Cal Aggie Hosts confront loud noise and vandalism, and confiscate liquor and beer bottles from students.

A number of the *Hosts*, who start out at \$4.75/hour, have gone on to become police officers. Today the program boasts from 120 to 170 *Hosts*, depending on the time of year. Most are hired during the winter quarter for work during the busy spring quarter when an increased number of them patrol during critical times, such as nights, weekends, and exam week.

Greek Patrols

In a program targeted at violence generally, rather than at vandalism alone, Rutgers University in New Jersey, with 49 Greek organizations on campus, enforces good behavior in part through its Board of

Control, a group of at least 12 fraternity and sorority students who check on fraternity parties in progress to make sure there is no vandalism, sexual misconduct, fighting, or other misbehavior. Local police train the students to confront violent situations, to write up violations of school policy they may encounter during their patrols, and to call the police if there is any violence.

According to Teresa Loser, head of the school's Fraternity and Sorority Office, the patrol is able to function "because the university limits fraternity parties to Friday and Saturday evenings, requires that all parties be registered in advance with the school's Fraternity Affairs Office, and submits the list of planned parties to the local police department."

The Board of Control checks out every party three times a night, at approximately 10:00 p.m., midnight, and 2:00 a.m., each time recording on a checklist whether the party is (a) making proper use of invitations or guest lists; (b) checking IDs; (c) using stamps or bracelets to identify guests of legal drinking age; and (d) keeping the noise down. The patrol team informs the Greek officer in charge of the event of any violations and turns in the forms to the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Affairs the following Monday.

According to Loser, "We clamp down hard on fraternities that violate our policies—we took away one fraternity's social privileges for a year and took them out of the intramural sports program; we put another fraternity on probation."

Greek Patrols could be trained and instructed specifically to target vandalism. Evening and weekend patrols could monitor student drinking and other drug use, watching for rowdy, intoxicated students. The patrols could then approach the students and advise them that vandalism will be punished firmly and swiftly. Being identified as a potential vandal and receiving a warning from a patrol could deter even an intoxicated student from

doing damage. When vandalism did occur, it might be easier to identify the offender.

Controlled Access

According to Ellen Gold, Director of Eastern Michigan University's Snow Health Center in Ypsilanti, as a commuter school the university's biggest problem with vandalism involves damage to cars in its large parking lots. In one incident, a drunk student smashed a number of cars parked in a school lot.

In an effort to address the problem, the school increased security patrols at the lots, particularly in the evening and after campuswide events. Increased lighting in the lots is another strategy the university, like many other schools, has used to prevent vandalism and other crime.

At commuter schools, cars are often the target of alcohol-related vandalism.

In the past, following large campus sporting events, bathrooms in the University of Virginia's School of Education, which is in the path of school's football stadium, sometimes became the target of intoxicated students who damaged stalls and bathroom fixtures. The school has taken to locking the School of Education the day of games. The building closings, combined with greater security during and after campus sporting events, has helped to reduce vandalism. While no significant displacement of the problem to other locations has been noted, the student union has also been the site of some vandalism, including graffiti and destruction of furniture. As a result, the school has improved lighting and replaced furniture in the union with sturdier chairs and tables.

The Substance-Free Residence Hall

A number of schools have established drug- and alcohol-free floors in dorms.

Although often not targeted specifically at vandalism reduction, they appear in some cases to have reduced the problem. Western Washington University in Bellingham set up a substance-free residence hall specifically to control vandalism. In 1993, school administrators turned the first four floors of Nash Hall, a seven story student residence, into a drug-free living area. Previously, Nash had the worst reputation for vandalism of every dormitory on campus. It remains the closest hall to the downtown bars.

The school advertised the living quarters to incoming freshmen, who were required to sign a substance-free contract promising not to use alcohol, drugs, or tobacco in the dormitory. (Incoming students who wanted to live in a substance-free hall but were unwilling to sign a contract were placed on the top three floors.) The residence director's approach to violations is to reinforce the culture of wellness rather than automatically punish offenders.

Vandalism rates—previously the worst of any residence hall on campus—have declined from several thousand dollars a year at Nash to \$60, while vandalism costs at the school's other halls have remained the same.

Since it became substance-free, vandalism rates—previously the worst of any residence hall on campus—have declined at Nash Hall at Western Washington University from several thousand dollars a year to \$60, while vandalism rates at the other halls on campus have remained the same.

At Washington University in St. Louis, substance-free residence halls have existed since 1990 when an alcohol and other drug-free dorm was created in response to a well-organized campaign by students to

Selecting a Name

According to Chuck Cychosz, coordinator of Alcohol Education and Substance Abuse Programs at Iowa State University in Ames, what a school calls its substance-free residence hall can influence student receptivity to the idea. Cychosz notes that at Iowa State, "alcohol-free" did not sell as well as the concept of a "wellness hall." Because "alcohol-free is code language for boring, we found that the wellness hall idea is a better way to market the concept."

create the special housing. While its first substance-free residence was restricted to 100 upperclass students, the school has since added first-year students to the hall and created several mixed-year substance-free dormitories. Presently, the university offers more than 300 substance-free spaces in its residence halls. Tony Nowak, director of residential life at the university, reports that growing numbers, of students are indicating on their housing application a desire to live in substance-free housing.

At Washington University's first substance-free freshman dorm, what was formerly the school's most vandalized dormitory became the school's least vandalized building.

The decrease in student vandalism following implementation of the substance-free policy in student housing has been dramatic. Rubelmann Hall, the university's first substance-free freshman residence hall and formerly the school's most vandalized dormitory, became the school's least vandalized building. According to Tony Nowak, in its first year of operation as a drug-free residence hall,

Making Students Aware of the Cost of Vandalism

Ralph Rickgarn of student housing at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis reports that making students aware of the cost of campus vandalism may help reduce the problem. At Minnesota, the housing office posted a sign in a commonly vandalized elevator publicizing that vandalism in the elevator alone cost the school (and the students) \$10,000 per year. According to Rickgarn, students who read the notice said, “You’ve got to be kidding.” Perhaps because the students learned that the cost of repairs came out of their own residence hall and campus fees, vandalism in the elevator declined. Rickgarn believes other schools may be able to achieve similar success with this appeal to student pocketbooks.

no incidents of vandalism were reported at Rubelmann.

According to Dan Herbst, director of the Health Awareness Program at Washington University, “The substance-free policy is great in terms of reducing wear and tear on the dorms.”

The Substance-Free Fraternity

Fraternities have reduced vandalism and other alcohol-related violence by banning alcohol and other drug use in their houses. At the University of Maine in Orono, the chapter of the Sigma Chi Fraternity went substance-free in 1992. After the chapter house was severely trashed in 1990 at a typical weekend blowout, the national Sigma Chi fraternity placed Maine’s 90-year-old chapter on two years’ probation, expelled all but 12 of its 55 residents, and banned alcohol and parties. Nonetheless, according to John Moon, the house adviser, an acquaintance rape occurred in 1991 at a party held in violation of the conditions of probation that “blew the lid off everything.” T.J. Sullivan of BACCHUS and GAMMA adds, “when a woman alleged that she had been raped at the chapter house during a party, the university told the group to drastically clean up its act or shut down.”

As a result, Moon and other chapter alumni, who own the building, raised money to renovate completely what was once a beautiful structure and put in place a plan to make—and keep—the chapter

substance-free. All the previous residents were kicked out this time, new members were told that alcohol and drugs would not be tolerated, and a resident adviser was installed in the house.

As of 1994, there were already 28 residents and 17 other brothers. Initially seen by members of other fraternities as “geeks,” the brothers at Sigma Chi are now considered “cool.” In fact, according to Moon the house has become a model for other fraternities on campus, two of which have also gone chemical-free.

Of course, establishing substance-free residence halls, while it may reduce the problem of vandalism, will have only a limited impact by itself. These halls may attract primarily those students who are least likely to drink to excess and commit vandalism in the first place, leaving the vandalism-prone binge drinking students untouched in the other dormitories. As a result, the approach should be only one component of a comprehensive plan to eliminate vandalism.

Early Intervention

Carolyn Mesnak, the coordinator of the University of Akron’s Health Care Center in Akron, Ohio, says there is a frequent connection between a student’s drug habit and vandalism. Mesnak explains, “to support their drug habit, addicted students will steal jewelry and loose cash found in dorm rooms. At the University of Akron, some drug users have been known to

break into cars to steal radios or other easily sold personal property. There have also been break-ins at residence halls in which students have stolen books left unattended in dorm rooms.”

To address the problem, Akron has developed prevention programming based on the notion of family ties. The programming stresses that, on campus, one’s roommate, fraternity brother, or sorority sister is a “family member” who deserves looking after. To promote this watchful caring, training sessions teach students, faculty, residence hall advisers, and other campus personnel to be aware of telltale signs of substance abuse as potential precursors to campus vandalism and other antisocial behavior. Participants are taught how an addicted or intoxicated person behaves, including

- slurred speech;
- loss of motor control;
- very irregular hours such as entirely sleepless nights;
- dilated pupils;
- a tendency to lie;

Combatting Graffiti

According to Victoria Harrison, chief of police at the University of California, Berkeley, the university had created an interdisciplinary committee to address the problem of graffiti on campus buildings. Although the committee did not originally include a campus representative from the alcohol and other drug prevention field, after considering the role of AOD use in campus vandalism, Harrison has recommended that a campus representative from the AOD prevention field be added to the committee. Berkeley’s move comes in acknowledgment of the need to take comprehensive interdisciplinary approaches to problems such as campus vandalism.

- manifestations of physical abuse; and
- verbal abuse.

According to Mesnak, Akron's efforts are designed to educate with more than a "Just Say No" approach. Training and peer education include exercises in what students can do if they suspect or know someone they care about is doing something illegal or improper. Fellow students are instructed to encourage the alcohol or drug user to seek treatment and, if the person refuses to acknowledge a problem, to alert counselors or student advisers to the problem.

Referral to Counseling

Dean Angela Davis of the Office of Residence Life at the University of Virginia (UVA) in Charlottesville explains that while vandalism related to alcohol and other drug use is not a major problem at UVA, "where there's vandalism, there is often a connection to alcohol." According to Davis, most vandalism that does occur takes place in residence halls.

At UVA, home to roughly 6,000 students, when noncriminal incidents such as certain kinds of vandalism occur and the student is apprehended, a referral is routinely made to the student-run judiciary, which tries the case (criminal matters are handled by local or campus police). The office of the dean of students oversees the hearing.

Any student found guilty of an offense involving alcohol or other drugs receives a mandatory referral to the mental health division of the Department of Student Health for consultation and evaluation. At the end of the one-hour consultation, during which a routine alcohol and other drug and family history is taken, a treatment recommendation is made.

According to Michael Fisher of UVA's Department of Student Health, there have been several cases in recent years in which continued enrollment in the university by a student who has vandalized property was made contingent on participation in

treatment. Although treatment is not mandated in most cases, Fisher reports that most students sent to student health for consultation enter treatment even though they initially deny they have a drinking problem. The Department of Student Health's goal is to "change behavior rather than punish." However, according to Shamim Sisson, UVA's assistant dean of students, the school also may apply its standards of conduct for punishing students found guilty of vandalism.

Conclusion

Many schools view vandalism strictly as a campus crime control issue. Among the control strategies schools have used are

- using trained students to patrol large campus events, dormitories, and fraternities;
- implementing target hardening strategies such as controlling access to frequently vandalized campus locations like parking lots and restrooms; and
- establishing substance-free residence halls and fraternities.

Some schools, however, have approached vandalism as a health problem which requires addressing the offender's abuse of alcohol or drugs. These strategies have included prevention programming based on the notion of family ties and referring students who commit noncriminal acts of violence for recommended or mandatory evaluation and counseling.

Because of the complexity of the vandalism problem, schools are likely to be most effective in putting a dent in the problem by adopting both strategies: using multiple control and punitive measures, and providing appropriate substance abuse prevention and treatment services.



Our Mission

The mission of the Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention is to assist institutions of higher education in developing alcohol and other drug (AOD) prevention programs that will foster students' academic and social development and promote campus and community safety.

How We Can Help

The Center offers an integrated array of services to help people at colleges and universities adopt effective AOD prevention strategies:

- Training and professional development activities
- Resources, referrals, and consultations
- Publication and dissemination of prevention materials
- Support for the Network of Colleges and Universities Committed to the Elimination of Drug and Alcohol Abuse
- Assessment, evaluation, and analysis activities

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